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ABSTRACT

An overview of the principal's changing role in the 1990s is examined in this paper, with a focus on changing expectations and current issues and problems. The school administrator of the 1990s must possess an increasing complexity of knowledge and skills, vision, and understanding of participatory management, and must recognize the changing superintendent/principal relationship. A conclusion is that principals require an understanding of interpersonal relations, and organizational vulnerability, and they must have an analytical approach to school administration. In addition, the leadership role must change to remove principals from the balancing act they perform when dealing with central office staff and policies, teachers and their unions, students and parents, as well as community expectations. Twenty-six endnotes are attached. (LMI)

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The Principal of the 90's:
Changing Expectations Realized ?

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Introduction

Improving schools has again become a focus of national attention. Studies reconfirm the importance that the individual school plays in overall school improvement and the critical role of the principal in such efforts. Until the 1970's and 1980's little was known about developing the skills that a principal must have to make schools effective. It has long been recognized that there is a need to promote staff development for teachers and staff as a means to enhance the learning of students, but only recently has there been a recognition of the need to alter the role of school principals.

The role of the school principal of the future may seem an apposite topic to a scholarly endeavor, but first an overview of the changing role of the principalship in the 70's and 80's and a review of those factors which influenced the change would be enlightening. The educational community and the general public need to understand the role of today's principal before any consideration can be given to what it may entail in the future. Today's practicing principals have found themselves in a magnified fish bowl bombarded by new expectations and new responsibilities without the appropriate knowledge or adequate training to deal with such challenges.

Perhaps no other professional position has received more attention or been given greater latitude to articulate

a new role than the 1980's school principal. A cursory review of the literature of the 1980's highlights the changing principalship and reveals considerable debate about the changing nature of the position. The decade of the 1980's has produced a growing body of knowledge concerning effective schools and the key role the principal shares in such schools.

A number of educators began examining the school organization and administration from the concept that the principal was the critical element in the success of any school. The concept of the school administrator as a passive reactive manager has given way to a perception of the administrator as an active instructional leader. The studies further identify several critical factors which affect principals in their leadership role.

Early research revealed the principal's actions and the resulting effect on their schools. Subsequent research examined indepth methodology and precision, as well as quantitative and qualitative procedures used to document principalship performances.

The principal must work to institute changes which are to be assimilated into the life of the school. Changes which require new patterns of behavior require the adoption, implementation and institutionalization of the principal's visions. Research has indicated principals can no longer lead change efforts singlehandedly, but must work through

others to formulate a team bent on achieving community based goals.

The awesome responsibility for all aspects of school life eventually, however, is placed upon the principal. In the 1980's principals came to terms with the reality of the changing roles with increased demands being placed upon their position. In the 1990's the principal is challenged to facilitate administrative vision, concern for the student's learning process and faculty, and to apply these concepts in a cooperative environment.

Present Issues and Problems Confronting Today's Principal

The tidal wave of educational reform began in 1983 with the publication of A Nation at Risk. Suddenly our schools were in the spotlight, and they found themselves confronting a society demanding changes in its schools. Much has happened to the role of the principal during the period of time from 1983 until today with relation to job demands. A review of responses from a "A Ten - Year Study: The K - 8 Principal In 1988," survey of elementary and middle school principals, reveals several aspects of the principalship that have changed since 1983. The report addresses seven areas: 1) building level authority and responsibility; 2) curriculum development; 3) development of instructional practice; 4) fiscal decision making; 5) personnel selection; 6) personnel management; and 7)

participation in district policy development.¹

Of these seven areas, principals identified four areas of the seven where they perceived a significant change in their responsibilities. The area of personnel evaluation was deemed the area with the greatest change. Second in the ranking was development of instructional practices, with curriculum development, and building level authority in the third and fourth positions respectively.²

School districts throughout the nation have introduced or developed programs to foster greater instructional leadership by principals. The development of leadership skills in principals has become a major thrust of school districts and staff development efforts. Some 30 states have developed or purchased academics for administrative leadership training.³ The evolving concept of the school principal as leader may develop a different set of expectations for the principal. Previously, the accepted model for a principal's behavior emphasized the role of educator or administrator. The research of the latter part of the 1980's revealed a tendency to place different responsibilities and roles on the principalship. One of the principal's major responsibilities was the basic school curriculum. This new role also resulted in a change in relationship between policy-makers and the principal. "The concept of principal as leader also implied a redefinition of the relationship between school and the school

district."⁴

Research directly relating to the role of the principal as the instructional leader has offered inconclusive results. Although some studies indicate that instructional leadership by principals has positive effects on the academic success of a school, other studies have found similar patterns of leadership activities and behavior by principals in both effective and ineffective schools (where effectiveness is measured by student achievement on test scores).⁵

A more recent review of research on the leadership role of the principal was conducted by Rolf K. Bank.⁶ He cited one study of leadership behavior by principals which used a 30-item questionnaire containing five scales: staff development, teacher supervision and evaluation, instructional facilitation, resource acquisition and building maintenance, and student problems resolution. The results of the five scales included components which evaluated the principal both as "educator" and "administrator". It further emphasized the "principal as leader" adding a new dimension to the traditional distinction between the dual role of "principal as educator" and "principal as administrator".⁷

Other approaches to the concept of the principal-as-leader concept placed greater emphasis on the principal as a key actor in the educational effectiveness of the school.

In 1984 Sergiovanni, citing studies by Barnard, Selznick, and Bennis on organizational leadership that support this view, maintained that the principal's key function in an effective school was to establish goal consensus among staff and developing an institutional identity.⁸ Murphy conceptualizes the effective principal as having an instrumental role in "coupling" the school through supervision of the curriculum, and thus decreasing the typically "loosely coupled" organization we know as a school.⁹

When the Heritage Foundation studied the principals of 65 secondary schools honored by the U.S. Department of Education in 1983 for excellence in education, each principal was asked what factors were most critical in determining school effectiveness. Mentioned by 80% of the principals was faculty participation in decision making. The principals studied indicated that decisions made in this manner tended to stand firmer, last longer, and gain greater acceptance.¹⁰

Effective management, as recommended in the report of the Commission on Excellence in Education Administration (UCEA), 1987, calls for a dramatic change in the operation of our schools. A changed relationship among teachers and administrators and preparation of education administrators and their work are indicated.¹¹ The challenge is to identify those patterns of school management that are not

only effective but also produce excellence and then to create an organizational structure that encourages and facilitates those patterns.

It is necessary then to understand the data about the principal's role of the 80's before approaching expectations for the practitioners of the 90's. The ways the practitioners will differ from the predecessors of the previous decade will be the focus of the remainder of this paper.

The Principal of the 90's

The slowly but clearly evolving shift in the focus of the principalship during the past decade has reoriented the position and promises to remain in a state of flux in the future. Changes have taken place which make the bureaucratic nature of the school leadership position an untenable one. The first of the many changes was the increased complexity of the required knowledge and skills necessary for the administration of a school. The complexity of today's institute makes it virtually impossible to find a single person possessing all of the knowledge to carry out the complex tasks required in the operation of a modern day school.

In the past decade the majority of schools operated under what is usually referred to as the bureaucratic model. In this model the system regulates the activities of the

teachers and other school professionals, limiting the controls and the amount of discretion those individuals exercise.¹² The bureaucratic model requires a clear line of authority: regulations are developed by superiors to govern subordinates, actions and activities. Decision making is centralized around the principal. School administrators are trained to manage schools; basically there is a set of rules and an inspection system to be certain the rules meet compliance.

The assumptions found in the bureaucratic model tend to overemphasize specialization of tasks, routine operating rules, and formal procedures in organizing for teaching and learning. Standard operating procedures are emphasized for teachers, and standard outcomes are established for students. Sergiovanni stated, "Within bureaucracies principals and teachers are expected to behave like bureaucrats rather than professionals."¹³

Educational systems are similar to other kinds of systems. How does one go about changing any other kind of system to create improvement? As society has continued to change, its needs have also changed. The process of education administration reform will be a gradual process, but the more advanced our technology, the greater capability there is for developing the people who will be in charge of our schools. The technological developments of the "information age" are making the school principal's position

inevitably different.¹⁴

A question that educators must ask themselves is how much time should be spent trying to reform the prevailing structure by doing things that will make an antiquated system simply a more streamlined antiquated system. Another question would be whether current practices should be scrapped in favor of an alternative approach to the administration of our schools. In the past it may have been possible for principals to understand and often to execute all the tasks better than their staff members. Previously, the educational training of teachers was less extensive than that of the principal. Today we find teachers and other staff members are usually as well-educated as the administrator. It is important that the principal of the 90's realize that the expertise and hands-on experience of those they manage often will result in a greater understanding of the needs of students. Furthermore, these individuals possess sufficient training to prepare approaches to facilitate maximum productivity in their students.¹⁵

Before principals can become educational leaders and develop the school in their images, it is necessary to have a change in the organizational structure. It would be easy to single out the principal as the individual requiring an attitudinal change. This would merely require a restructuring of principal training programs. However, Van

Cleve and Morris, describing the role of the principal as the setting for "negotiated order", propose principals, teachers, other employees, pupils, and even parents are in a web of negotiation within the school.¹⁶ The participants together work out a complex arrangement of responsibility and authority, of many role expectations, interests, values, group relationships, and goals.¹⁷

In participatory management, groups within the school environment pursue different interests and influence one another. Edwin Bridge addresses the principal in both the role of originating executive and responding person in the decision-making milieu of the school.¹⁸ The effectiveness of the future school principals will lie in their ability to make activities and involvement meaningful work for others. A major task and ongoing part of the principals' role of the 90's will be to get members of the school staff and district to understand what they are doing and to assist in communicating to all segments of the school community the meanings of their behavior.

Principals of the 90's will be required to give meaning to all the work performed by their staff. Technology should eliminate some of the routine clerical work performed by teachers in the past decade. Future principals will need to be equipped to be someone worth working for rather than being someone performing an organizational role. The present day educator no longer views the bureaucratic

manager as the boss and the measure of authority that previously came automatically with the role.¹⁹

Principals will need to function within a school base management evolving from the premise that the individual school functions as the decision-making unit within the educational system. The principal and faculty of a school should constitute a natural management team.

Changing Role Definition

Perhaps the most important area that future principals will need to learn to deal with is the process of school based management and its effect on the relationship between the superintendent and principal and their collaborative approach to improving administrative performance.²⁰ When a district organizes for school-based management, each school is a relatively autonomous unit of which the principal becomes the chief executive officer. The greater responsibility assumed by the principal and his staff will need to be matched by an equivalent measure of authority: the school management team must have both responsibility and authority. The principal and other school personnel will need to design the budget, hire instructors and other school personnel, as well as select the curriculum.²¹

As the principalship develops and expands the concept of leader, a new set of expectations for the school principal will be described. Previous models for behavior

of principals which tended to focus on the role of the principal as educator or administrator will be less relevant. The principal of the 90's will be required to have leadership behavior skills as both educator and administrator. The concept of the principal as leader ultimately implies a redefinition of the relationship between the school and the school district.²²

Knowledge and Vision

It will be necessary for the future principal to have increased complexity of knowledge and the skills required of the school principals of the 80's. As Sergiovanni explains, "form should follow function". Principals must have knowledge sufficient to apply this statement as they organize their schools. Often school structure emerges from habit, tradition, or political pressures. Principals will continue to be required to deal with multiple and often conflicting purposes that make it difficult to exact alignment with structural difficulties or nearly impossible situations. A better approach might be to achieve a balance among competing requirements when planning for the schools of the future.²³

The knowledge and skills needed to address the organization and structuring of the school of the 90's will include some of these areas critical to the principals of the 80's, as well as sufficient additions of knowledge and

skill training to apply the material to a re-structured school, a different population, and a different set of expectations.

Not only will the principals of the 90's deal with a different leadership style and a vastly expanded knowledge base relating to the principalship, they will need to have vision and the necessary training to be able to apply it to their specific situation. The knowledge-work endeavor should be an integral part of the organizational structure of any future school system that is striving for excellence. Sergiovanni (1987) describes the following endeavors:

1. Cooperation - Cooperative arrangements facilitate teaching and enhance learning.
2. Empowerment - Feelings of empowerment contribute to ownership and increase commitment and motivation to work.
3. Responsibility - Responsibility upgrades the importance and significance of work and provides a basis for recognition of success.
4. Accountability - In successful school organizational structure allows staff to be accountable for their decisions and achievements.
5. Meaningfulness - When jobs are perceived as meaningful they not only take on a significance but also provide feelings of intrinsic satisfaction.

6. Ability - Authority - In successful schools organizational structures promote authority based on ability. ²⁴

The scope of the principalship for the 90's has been extended well beyond the school's structural walls. The principal must be a part of the total community, including its pressure, prejudices, and power plays. The principalship of the 90's is an open system, ranging from identifying community needs to a full scale development of the so-called community school.²⁵

Schools are changing and are likely to continue doing so. Principals during the 90's are going to need to learn to adapt to as well as serve as change agents. They must realize that they can acquire information, and can learn useful ways of organizing it. Often they are taught useful ways of disorganizing and then reorganizing knowledge to create something new; but it is necessary to begin with information and then enhance it with skill and talent.²⁶

Conclusion

The principal of the 90's will need to have elements of leadership, vision, initiative, and resourcefulness which in some incidences have not yet been developed. The principal of the future will need to create a set of school-wide norms to facilitate diversity of learning and teaching methods and procedures for students and teachers. Future principals

will need to be change agents as well as developers: they will need to be skillful in their orientation toward interpersonal relations and not just toward the organization as a whole. But the principal will also need the skill to address group problem solving. The principal will need an indepth understanding of group dynamics and training as a decision maker, allowing a clear view of the concept of the total organization.

Future principals will not escape the political and organizational vulnerability of the position. The development of an alliance of teachers and parents will help place the parents themselves on the firing line and help defray any possible interference in reaching maximum school efficiency. Future principals will need to be very sensitive to the dynamics of power both in the larger system and in their own school. They will need to understand the necessity for seeking out sources of power in the informal network and need to be adept at creating alliances. Understanding and working with the requirements of the situation will be more important than the policies of it.

The future principal will need to be well trained in the analytical approach to school administration. Training and experience will reduce emotional involvement in situations: principals must guard against responding to initial impulses. The necessity to be objective will require analytical skills - dealing first with the problem

or situation and then with its substance or resulting fallout. One of the problems facing future principals of the 90's is the uniqueness of the administrative position. Principals are going to grapple with many of today's problems, but the leadership role must change to remove the principals from the balancing act they are now required to perform when dealing with central office staff and policies, teachers and their unions, students and parents, as well as the community expectations. Probably no principal of the 90's will be satisfied in the professional role, until the perceived role is placed on a shelf. Only then can the true role of the principal be developed.

Endnotes

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